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## AMERICAN INDIFFERENCE TO AMERICAN ART.

PERHAPS no collection of American pictures that could now be made would so stir the heart of the picture lover as did the first sight of the exhibition of the Society of American Artists in 1878. That was really an oasis, and a very delightful one, in the dreary American Academic Desert—none the less a desert for the gaudily painted French cabarets and dance-houses erected by speculative dealers along the route for the spoiling of our aristocratic money-bags. Hope lay like a sunbeam along those walls, and a youthful confidence and enthusiasm looked out from the pictures, and met half-way an equal confidence and enthusiasm on the part of the spectator.

If all was not poetry, it all seemed to be; although, as poetry had never been present in any exhibition of American pictures since these exhibitions were, there is no doubt we were too ready to take the song of three or four larks for a grove full of melody. To the critic who stood tip-toe upon this little hill with his shoes full of the sand got by wading through twenty years of Academy exhibitions, what wonder if the landscape seemed enchanting—if he took the wild briar for a rose, and the dandelion meadow for a field of the cloth of gold? But, all exceptions made, and that exhibition of 1878 weighed in the scales of time, it seems certain that it contained not a few good works, and the honest promise of much excellence.

If the exhibitions by the same Society that have followed it have seemed, taking the most favorable view, to stand still rather than to advance, this may be mainly accounted for by the shameful indifference of the public and its avowed preference for pictures painted abroad. It is a fact that does not admit of question that, as a rule, the rich, picture-buying American will not if he can help it buy American pictures. We say, as a rule, for there are and have been notable exceptions. We were shown recently a considerable private collection of pictures, all by American artists—each an excellent specimen of its author's skill, and the collection as a whole, most attractive, and doing credit to the owner's taste and judgment. But every one knows that such cases are rare indeed. All the picture dealers tell the same story, and the sales of the yearly exhibitions still confirm it. The young men of this Society are really fighting against heavy odds. They are the best painters we have, yet they have small employment.

We have in New York and Boston a few men who paint portraits in a style that wins admiration even in Paris where are painted the best portraits, yet these men are so stingily employed that it must be hard for them to live. In France such men as Duveneck, Alden Weir, William M. Chase, Wyatt Eaton, Francis Lathrop, Thayer and Vinton would find themselves in full employment; the best people would be painted by them. But, here, if our Museum of Art wants a portrait of its President it gets it painted by Bonnat—and gets as bad a specimen of the Frenchman's art as it deserves. A portrait-painter comes here from England and without trouble secures so many orders that he can with difficulty keep his engagements, yet no good judge can be found who will say that his pictures deserve such success. More meretricious pictures have rarely been painted than the most of these, and their bad drawing and crude color are without excuse.

Is it any wonder that the best exhibition of the year shows no perceptible advance, and that the walls of the Academy are, if possible, a drearier waste of imbecility than ever before?

## NEW PICTURES AT THE DEALERS.

MR. AVERY has on view a picture by Jules Breton, which made a stir when it was shown at the late Salon. It is the outskirts of a little village of Finistère at twilight with a group of four women in dark gowns and white caps in the foreground. They are engaged in serious conversation. Farther back are a pair of lovers and some of the houses of the village. Beyond this point the ground dips abruptly and rises again in a long ridge quite dark against the evening sky. There is much realism in the picture of that poetic sort which is peculiar to Breton since Millet's death. The character of the village population including its pigs and cats, the thick grass and scattered

rocks by the roadside, the masonry of the houses, the sky and the moon which are the same nowhere else, all are characteristic of a Celtic country. Jules Breton has never produced a better picture.

Munkacsy's "The Studio" is a large composition with two figures, one of them being a portrait of the painter himself. It is painted in his well-known manner, and is especially strong in chiaroscuro. It was exhibited at the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1878, when the artist obtained a grand medal of honor. Each of these pictures is worth many visits, and, in fact, neither can be appreciated until it has been seen many times.

Equally in contrast with Breton and Munkacsy, whether we compare his work for sentiment with the one, or for technical expression with the other, are three canvases at the Moore & Clarke Gallery by that frankest and most powerful exponent of the French realistic school, Gustave Courbet, whom Mr. Jarves has not inaptly likened, in his way, to Walt Whitman. It is not difficult to conceive that if our American Browning could handle the brush with the same ease that he does the pen, he would give us just such a sea piece as we find by Courbet in this gallery. There is a heavy iron gray sky and a dark, angry sea with cruel reefs in the foreground made visible for the moment by the parting of the seething breakers; near the horizon are suggested a few fishing boats hurriedly taking in sail as the storm sweeps down in all its fury. The power of the painter is so startling that one does not think for a moment of his uncouth method of expressing himself. The other two canvases by this eccentric Frenchman are a man in hunting costume, intended, it is said, to represent himself, and the study of a flower-bed with a background of trees. Both are characteristic, but neither is important in size nor especially interesting in subject.

## My Note Book.



ANDID observers will admit that the picture market, native and foreign, has rarely been so demoralized as it is now. The recent absurd legislation against imported paintings doubtless has something to do with it. But it is by no means the principal cause of the stagnation, which set in months before Congress distinguished itself in this matter. The chief cause will be found, I believe, in the natural reaction against the instability of the entire business—the cupidity of the dealer and the dishonesty of the auctioneer, and the ignorance of the buyer who so easily becomes the prey of both. In spite of the prevailing extravagance throughout the land and the desire of the rich man to own costly pictures, his purchases do little or nothing for art in this country. Our American Gorgias Midas seldom buys American paintings, and when he gains possession of good foreign works, he, as a rule, with the true spirit of the parvenu, jealously hides them from public view for fear of making them "common," like the famous art treasures, for instance, of the effete aristocracies of Europe. He enriches the dealers by his prodigality, demoralizes foreign artists by his eagerness to own any canvases with their names, and discourages native talent by making it unfashionable.

OUR average American Midas indeed is the natural foe of American art. He buys his art as he buys his land or his stocks, only when he thinks it a good investment—in the same way as he prefers to buy his wife diamonds, instead of gold jewelry made precious by artistic workmanship. Unlike the real man of taste who will confidently acquire the work of unrecognized genius because *he* knows its merit, Mr. Midas, conscious of his own incompetence to form a judgment, selects his pictures first on the *names* of the artists and secondly on the guarantee of the dealer as to their genuineness. It is not strange that the dealer should make all he can out of such a client. He is generally honest in his way; by which I mean that while he charges the most extravagant profits on his purchases

he seldom deceives his patrons as to the genuineness of any picture he may offer them. It may be the worst picture the painter ever produced; but the *name* is genuine, and Mr. Midas stoutly believes that, as on a check or a bill of exchange, the signature is the principal thing.

WITH the picture dealer of the second class, the genuineness of a signature is a matter of no great importance. You can buy all the Diazes, Corots, and Rousseaus you want at the New York auctions which are supplied by this gentleman, and very often "on the quiet" by the fashionable dealer in Fifth Avenue. When an auctioneer wants material for a mock auction "sale," he does not hesitate to invite the proudest dealer in the city to contribute toward it, and the proudest dealer is not a bit too proud to profit by this irregular way of doing business. A limit is put on the price of his picture. If it is reached, the picture is sold. If not, it is put up again at the next sale. The paintings of Mr. Kohn in Fifth Avenue were advertised recently to be sold at Leavitt's absolutely without reserve. Go to the gallery of his successor, or rather his partner, and see how many of them have been bought in. There is hardly an auctioneer of pictures in New York of whom you can buy with absolute certainty of being fairly treated; and this has become so well known and the public has been so often bitten that it is afraid of the auction room. Was there ever, for example, a worse mock auction than the recent Carroll affair conducted by the new firm of Ortgies & Co., successors to Kirby & Co.?

THE catalogue announced "over one hundred paintings from the collection of a veteran collector and connoisseur, embracing many superb examples of Old Masters and modern celebrities, now rarely offered at auction to be sold without reserve." It was a curious lot, owned chiefly by Thomas B. Carroll, of Troy, N. Y. Consisting for the most part of rubbish of the worst kind, there were scattered here and there a few pictures of undoubted merit; but upon every one of these so far as their value was known, a reserve price was placed. One was surprised, for example, to see two or three alleged Washington Allstons in such bad company. But they were genuine. The "John Kemble as Coriolanus (after Sir Thomas Lawrence)" with its strangely discolored hands—caused by the unstable pigments often used by Allston in his carnations—and the beautiful "Portrait of Alderman Boydell" were bought at the Ballestier sale in London a few years ago. The head of Washington, showing the left side of the face, attributed to Allston, may be, as it is claimed, one of the many "pot-boiler" copies made by the painter from his original picture now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; but it is certainly unworthy of his reputation. These portraits were bought in, and, I hear, have been offered for exhibition to the committee who have in charge the new loan collection of paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The "Saint and Angels," attributed to Van Schendel, was probably genuine, and the "Charles Carroll of Carrollton," attributed to Sully, undoubtedly was. These were also bought in. There was so little idea of selling the interesting pictures by John Quidor, illustrating Irving's "Knickerbocker" that only two out of the set of eight were exhibited. Two bargains at least were secured by Lanthier, apparently through the ignorance of the owners, who do not seem to have known their value. These were a powerful sketch called "The Captives" and catalogued as "unidentified," but said to be by Le Brun, and a curious little canvas which Lanthier is satisfied is a genuine Cuyp, and which was knocked down to that wide-awake dealer for thirteen dollars.

A MORE recent auction at Leavitt's of pictures, said to have belonged to "Edgar Mitchell, of Philadelphia," showed a shocking lot of rubbish, containing not a few absolute forgeries. An alleged Kensett, if genuine, was certainly unlike anything that artist is known to have painted; and the vile daubs credited to Constable, Birket-Foster, Kaulbach, Rousseau and Corot could hardly impose upon the veriest tyro. A large landscape attributed to F. E. Church was indignantly repudiated by that artist, who insisted that it be taken from the walls. He had his way, but the picture is pretty sure to appear as his at some other sale; for the person in charge of the gallery professed to be



satisfied that Mr. Church did paint it, notwithstanding his disclaimer. I have been asked whether Mr. Church could legally obtain possession of the picture, and confiscate it, inasmuch as he declares it to be a forgery. I think not. A somewhat similar question arose in England some years ago, in the case of J. R. Herbert, a Royal Academician, who refused to surrender a picture left with him by a certain dealer for verification. It bore what appeared to be his signature, but was so badly painted that he declined to return it unless the dealer would erase his name. This the latter would not do and brought suit to compel the surrender of the work. Sir Frederick Leighton and several other Academicians of high repute concurred in testifying that the picture was "a spurious daub, utterly worthless, and a palpable forgery." Nevertheless the plaintiffs obtained a verdict, and the indignant artist was obliged to return the picture, and pay one shilling damages and the costs.

A FAIR example of the manner in which forged pictures by European artists of repute find their way to this country may be seen in the following faithful transcript, by a clerk in the appraiser's office at the Custom House, of an invoice of pictures consigned to a dealer in this city. I wish that I could give the dealer's name, but that is not permitted. The spelling is according to the invoice:

Troyon.....	frs. 18	Huet.....	frs. 6
J. E. Millet.....	15	Wille.....	5
Corot.....	12	Nicollé.....	8
Th. Rousseau.....	12	Corot.....	6
do.....	15	Van Aulan.....	3
H. Regnault.....	50	Andriene.....	4
Caeser De Cock.....	50	Pils.....	10
Diaz.....	50	Guido Reni.....	2
Madrazzo.....	25	Prudhom.....	5
Horace Vernet.....	15	Gerard.....	12
Corot.....	50	Henry Irving.....	7
Desgoffe.....	30	David.....	10
Henry Piconca.....	250	F. Boucher.....	10
Bonington.....	7	Ary Schaeffer.....	5
Anton Watteau.....	10	N. Poussin.....	10
Henry Munnier.....	5	Fortuney.....	12
Watteau.....	5	P. P. Rubens.....	15
Carolus Duran.....	250	Girodet Trisson.....	15
Bericourt.....	6	Latour.....	7
L. Boilly.....	9	J. B. Huier.....	3

HERE is another revelation from the Custom House. But this comes in a printed document, being a report of Cyrus A. Stevens, assistant appraiser in the New York Custom House, to the recent tariff commission:

"We have considerable trouble also in regard to the word 'antiquity,' as to what shall be defined as an antiquity. According to the decision of the department, an antiquity is something made previous to the fifteenth century. It is my opinion that we should embrace the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and admit articles made within or previous to that time free. These articles serve as educators to the public taste, and therefore I think there should be no duty placed upon them. A great proportion of the goods entered as antiquities, however, are not genuine antiquities. Our people are deceived very often, so that really few antiquities come in here. I have a vase at the store now which is worth about 50 francs, but the owner had to pay £110 for it. I classified it for duty as an imitation. . . . The owner of the vase believed he had a genuine antiquity, and was not satisfied with my classification, and finally brought General Cesnola in to inspect it, and was not satisfied with his decision, and then called in Mr. Feuardent, who pronounced it of modern manufacture."

Mr Di Cesnola declared it genuine; but Mr. Feuardent had no trouble in proving the worthlessness of the object in question as well as the worthlessness of the opinion of the Metropolitan Museum of Art on the subject. The vase paid duty as an imitation. I may add that antiquities will be imported free of duty, without restrictions, when the new tariff law goes into effect next July.

SPEAKING of the exhibition of the Society of American Artists, The Sun says that there is not a picture there "which would be given a first-class place in the Salon." It happens, however, that one of the pictures, Sargent's young lady in black, not only was given a first-class place in the Salon, but was generally considered unexcelled by any portrait there.

THE Salmagundi Club recently gave a very pleasant entertainment at Sarony's Gallery, in honor of S. W. G. Benjamin, artist and critic, who goes to Persia to represent the United States Government—although what the United States Government wants with a representative at the court of the Shah it would be hard to say. A colossal cartoon, with strange inscriptions in alleged Persian, by Mr. Gregory, hung upon the wall with impressive effect. Mr. Benjamin is known

to us all here as a very amiable writer on art matters, and in following his vocation in "the land of black eyes and lemonade" it is to be hoped that he will not too readily accustom himself to the incisive methods of the East. He may remember that, if report speaks truly, the Shah himself is a slashing critic. He may have heard how, on one occasion, the monarch impetuously whipped out his scimitar and cut off the head of a slave in order to prove, by ocular demonstration, to a French artist who had shown him a picture of "Herodias with the head of John the Baptist," that the blood would certainly have left the lips of the Apostle within two minutes after his death. I do not know how personal will be the relations between Mr. Benjamin and the Shah; but it may not be amiss to warn him to refrain from critical discussions with his Imperial Majesty. There is no knowing what a sensitive monarch might do who is so finical as to mere matters of detail and so practical in his illustrations.

THAT clever artist and prince of good fellows, Elihu Vedder, was also warmly entertained by his fellow-artists prior to his return to Italy. No speeches were made at the dinner, but there was no lack of wit. When the guest was toasted and his hosts were about to raise their glasses to drink his health, Vedder stopped them, and, snatching the punch bowl from the table, drank from it and passed it around the table as a loving cup, each man drinking from it, amid much enthusiasm. Then a vow was registered by the whole company that they would save their empty paint tubes until enough metal should be gathered to make a loving cup which should be used at all such gatherings of the fraternity.

THE critic of The Times says that "bad drawing and awkward handling of paint" do not "necessarily deprive a painting to the right of a very high place." Does he mean the right to be "skied"?

IT is surprising how much energy New York society women can put into their work when they devote themselves to some worthy enterprise. The past winter has been notable for the excellent entertainments they have engineered for the benefit of various charitable objects; but none has been more deserving of the success attending it than the late brilliant concert at the Academy of Music—with Patti, Schalchi, Albani, and Joseffy on the programme—given in aid of "The New York Exchange for Woman's Work." I am sorry to see it generally reported in the newspapers, however, as a "charity concert." In the general and rather offensive sense of the word, the Woman's Exchange is not a charity, as those acquainted with its objects are aware. To those not acquainted with its objects, be it said that it is an admirably conducted society for the sale of the work of reduced gentlewomen, whose names are known only to the officers. Mrs. W. G. Choate, the indefatigable president, devotes much of her time and means to the furtherance of the aims of the society, and is actively seconded by an excellent board of managers. A fund is now being raised "to establish a permanent and suitable business house for the use of women, who, when financial troubles come, may prove to their husbands helpmeets indeed." It is believed that the profits of the concert will add about ten thousand dollars to this fund.

PROFESSIONAL dramatic authorship as a social accomplishment is the latest thing of the season, and, as is often the case with professional acting, it proceeds from a first effort "en amateur" in the interest of charity. Its advent, however, is fraught with infinitely less danger to the public; for, even more than in acting, it calls for a combination of brains and industry not commonly found in New York society. The success of Mrs. Burton N. Harrison's comedy "The Russian Honeymoon" at the Madison Square Theatre, therefore, may be viewed by playgoers without disturbing apprehensions. Managers of theatres are very practical in their ideas, and, although as with other mortals, their judgment is often at fault, they do not deliberately incur great expense and risk, in producing a new play by an unknown author, without weighing carefully the chances of failure. Mrs. Harrison is not quite a novice in dramatic literature, for she has written acceptably for amateur theatricals, and is becoming well known as a magazine writer. Her lit-

tle book on the Household Arts is without doubt the most practical that has appeared in this country or in Europe, and her contributions to THE ART AMATEUR are well known and appreciated. So let not her success delude every society miss with the idea that "any one can write a play."

"THE RUSSIAN HONEYMOON" is adapted from a vaudeville by Scribe, whose work suggests, in turn, "The Taming of the Shrew," by Shakespeare, "The Honeymoon," by Tobin, and "The Lady of Lyons," by Bulwer. Mrs. Harrison has freely acknowledged her indebtedness to Scribe, but some of her critics have taken much pleasure in rediscovering the fact for themselves. Apart from this pardonable little show of erudition the critics almost without exception have received her comedy with favor. The audience on the first night was very interesting; it suggested a little "élite directory" in itself. Many of those present had seen the play in its two-act state when given at the same theatre a few months ago by amateurs for the benefit of the Orthopedic Hospital, and wanted to see how such accomplished artists as Misses Agnes Booth and Miss Ada Dyas would take the parts, which had been cleverly acted by society favorites. The performance of Miss Dyas, as a pretty, spoiled but kind-hearted woman of fashion, could not have been improved. Mrs. Booth was not well fitted with the rôle of the heroine, which Mrs. Jas. B. Potter had played, not without faults, but with the aids of youth and beauty, and a charming vivacity which from some cause or other was not a whit the less charming because it was amateurish. On the whole, I think, the amateur performance does not suffer by comparison. The "Ivan" of Le Moyne, the "Koulikoff" of Max Freeman, and the "Micheline" of Miss Clayton were certainly improvements; but, considering the representation as a whole, what was gained in this respect was about counterbalanced by the conditions attending the somewhat perfunctory extension of the play from two acts to three. The pageant, too, at the close, which was an attractive feature at the amateur performance, when the supernumeraries included pretty children and beautiful women of society all attired with great taste, looks garish and out of keeping as an every night incident on the little stage of the Madison Square Theatre.

EDGING my way through the throng at the Academy on the "private view" night, I thought I discovered the reason that most of the best pictures were "skied." It was to give them a fair chance to be seen. Certainly those on the line were quite hidden from the view of most of the visitors. This was a very considerate arrangement of the hanging committee for this special occasion; but the committee seems to have forgotten to reverse the positions for the following days when the attendance slackened.

THE finances of the Metropolitan Museum should be in a desperate condition, indeed, to warrant the apparently indiscriminate sending of notices to persons, many of whom never heard of the museum, telling them that they may consider themselves members by paying ten dollars. The following is a copy of the letter which has been circulated broadcast among the members of the city clubs:

"METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART,  
CENTRAL PARK, FIFTH AVENUE AND EIGHTY-SECOND ST.,  
NEW YORK, March 22, 1883.

"JOHN SMITH, ESQ., CITY:

"DEAR SIR: You have been proposed as an annual member of this Institution. Please have the kindness to inform me if you accept the nomination.

Respectfully yours,

"L. P. DI CESNOLA."

At one of the clubs the other evening, just as they were sitting down to dinner, half a dozen of the members, on each being handed a note of which the above is a copy, grew hilarious and not a little sarcastic over the cheap honor conferred upon them. One pretended to be indignant and wrote to ask who had taken the liberty to propose his name without consulting him. But no doubt the bait will catch many small fish. I would suggest, however, that it might be made twice as effective if it should be understood that the payment of the ten dollars entitled the member to wear the honor on his card, say, like this: Mr. John Smith, A.M.M.M.A. MONTEZUMA.